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# THE QUEEN'S PARLIAMENTS.

BY H. W. LUCY (TOBY, M. P., OF "PUNCH").

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## PART I.

OF the crowd of Members of the House of Commons who on the 20th of November, 1837, thronged the bar of the House of Lords to catch a glimpse of the girl-Queen opening her first Parliament, only six are living at this day. That fact, standing alone, marks the unparalleled length of Queen Victoria's reign. Of the half dozen survivors, one is Mr. Leader, who represented Westminster in the first Parliament of the Queen, and distinguished himself by joining the minority of twenty who supported that once well-known, now forgotten, statesman, Mr. Coroner Wakley, in an amendment to the address. The ministry, avowedly Liberal, had omitted from the Queen's speech promise to undertake Parliamentary reform. The Coroner, with professional energy, forthwith proceeded to sit upon the government. He found only eighteen members to follow the lead of himself and co-teller in what might be construed as a rudeness to the young Queen, whose first speech was nominally the subject of debate.

Others of the six relics of this House of more than sixty years ago, are Mr. Hurst, Member for Horsham; Mr. Wentworth-Fitzwilliam, Member for Malton, now Earl Fitzwilliam; Sir Thomas Acland, Member for West Somerset, whose family name is honorably represented in the House of Commons of to-day by the Ex-Vice-President of the Council; Mr. Villiers, now, as then, Member for Wolverhampton, and Mr. Gladstone, to-day in busy seclusion at Hawarden, then Member for Newark, hearing his days before him and the tumult of his life.

Of the Queen's ministers who paid homage on the young girl's accession to the throne not one survives. Lord Melbourne was

First Minister of the Crown, none objecting to the Premier's being seated in the House of Lords, the less so since he had a vigorous lieutenant in the Commons in the person of Lord John Russell. Lord Palmerston was Foreign Secretary. It is incidental, but striking, evidence of the growth of the empire under the sway of the Queen and the direction of her fourteen parliaments that in 1837 there was no such personage as a Secretary of State for the Colonies. Great Britain's colonial possessions were by no means insignificant even sixty years ago. But with the assistance of an under-secretary specially concerned for the colonies their affairs were quite comfortably managed, in addition to his own duties, by the Secretary of State for War. It was not till 1854 that the offices were divided, Sir George Grey in that year becoming Colonial Secretary.

Looking down the yellowing page of the first division list recorded in the first Parliament of the Queen, one comes upon some familiar names starring the long columns of the now unknown. Sir Robert Peel was leader of the Opposition. By his side sat Lord Stanley, afterwards, as Earl of Derby, known as the Rupert of debate. O'Connell was in the prime of his power, the fullness of his force. His lieutenant was Richard Lalor Shiel, whose pallid face and delicate frame contrasted strangely with the ruddy countenance and burly body of the Liberator. Shiel was an orator in spite of his voice, which Mr. Gladstone once described as reminding him of "the sound of a tin kettle battered about from place to place."

"In anybody else," Mr. Gladstone testifies, "I would not, if it had been my choice, like to have listened to that voice. But in him I would not have changed it, for it was part of a most remarkable whole, and nobody ever felt painful while listening to it. Shiel was a great orator, and an orator of much preparation, carried, I believe, even to words, with a very vivid imagination and an enormous power of language and of strong feeling. There was a peculiar character, a sort of half-wildness in his aspect and delivery. His whole figure, his delivery, his voice, and his matter were all in such perfect keeping with one another that they formed a great Parliamentary picture. Although it is now thirty-five years since I heard Mr. Shiel, my recollection of him is just as vivid as if I had been listening to him to-day."

By an odd coincidence another Shiel lives in the recollection

of later members of the Queen's Parliaments by reason of his voice—or, to be more precise, by consequence of its temporary absence. Mr. Edward Shiel, nephew of the orator to whom Mr. Gladstone pays sympathetic tribute, was elected to the tenth Parliament of the Queen, representing Meath. When Mr. Parnell formed his militant party Mr. Shiel joined it for awhile, serving as whip. During one of the spells of all-night sittings, the usual contributors to the proceeding having talked themselves hoarse, the junior whip was impressed for active service, just as in times of stress on board ship the cook and steward are summoned to the pumps. Having a couple of hours' notice given him, Mr. Shiel prepared notes for a speech, and in due time was called upon by the Speaker. He rose in obedience to signal, but there was no other response. Members turning their attention to the benches below the gangway on the Opposition side observed a slight figure, upright, with a beardless face, paler than ordinary, staring straight at the Speaker. On closer inspection it was seen that Mr. Shiel's lips were moving, but not a whisper was audible. For fully ten minutes he remained on his feet, and when he sat down the House concluded he had finished his speech. Observation of the fact that he was no longer on his legs was the only evidence available.

Other members of this first Parliament of the Queen whose names are familiar to the present generation are Lord Ashley, who did a long life's work as Earl of Shaftesbury; Mr. Grote, the banker, whose annual drafts in favor of the ballot were honored after many years; Mr. Horsman, at this time Member for Cocker-mouth; Sir Harry Verney, whose handsome, venerable figure decorated the Conservative benches below the gangway so recently as the tenth Parliament of the Queen; Mr. Wyndham Lewis, just returned for Maidstone with Mr. Disraeli as colleague, not yet dreaming that some day Mrs. Wyndham Lewis would become Mrs. Disraeli, and later bloom as Lady Beaconsfield; many-lettered Lytton Bulwer (in the division list he figures as Edward G. E. L. Bulwer), who sat for Lincoln, with the famous Colonel Sibthorpe for colleague.

There is a George Granville Harcourt, Member for Oxfordshire, kinsman of a later Member for Oxford, who has added enduring Parliamentary fame to the family name. It is even more startling in running the eye down the Division List to

come upon the name Henry Labouchere. This is, of course, not the Editor of *Truth*, Member for Northampton in the present Parliament. It was his uncle, who, unconscious of offence to be given to the later developed convictions of his distinguished nephew, accepted a Peerage, and sat in the Upper House as Lord Taunton.

Behind Sir Robert Peel, in those now shadowy days, sat two young members, as yet untried, whose Parliamentary fame parallels if it does not surpass that of their first great leader. When the Queen's first speech was read in the House of Commons Mr. Gladstone was twenty-eight years old. Mr. Disraeli was thirty-three. Happily there are preserved to this day pen-and-ink pictures of the member for Maidstone in 1837, and the member for Newark in the same Parliament. We read of Disraeli's ringlets, of his silken black hair, his flashing eyes, his effeminate air and lisping voice, his dress-coat of black velvet lined with white satin; his white kid gloves, the long hanging fringe of black silk that fell from his wrist, with more black silk in the shape of a tassel adorning his ivory cane, with its handle inlaid with gold.

"Disraeli," writes an American traveller, who crossed the Atlantic before steamships were built, "has one of the most remarkable faces I ever saw. He is lividly pale, and, but for the energy of his action and the strength of his lungs, would seem to be a victim to consumption. His eye is black as Erebus, and has the most mocking, lying-in-wait sort of expression conceivable. His mouth is alive with a kind of working and impatient nervousness. When he has burst forth, as he does constantly, with a particularly successful cataract of expression, it assumes a curl of triumphant scorn that would be worthy of Mephistopheles."

"Mr. Gladstone," we read in pages descriptive of the British Senate in 1838, "is a fine-looking man. He is about the usual height and of good figure. His countenance is mild and pleasant, and has a highly intellectual expression. His eyes are clear and quick. His eyebrows are dark and rather prominent. There is not a dandy in the House but envies what Truefit would call his fine head of jet black hair. It is always carefully parted from the crown downwards to his brow, where it is tastefully shaded. His features are small and regular, and his complexion must be a very unworthy witness if he does not possess an abundant stock of health."

Mr. Disraeli did not wait long before he gave the House of Commons a taste of his quality. The first Parliament of the Queen was opened on the 20th of November, 1837. On the 7th day of the following month the ringleted member for Maidstone delivered that historic speech with its angry prophetic last word: "The time will come when you *shall* hear me."

Mr. Roebuck was not present when the Queen delivered her first speech in Parliament, having been defeated at Bath at the general election following on the accession of Her Majesty. He came in four years later, and thereafter, up to the Parliament of 1873, when he was elected for Sheffield, he fitfully reappeared on the scene. He made one prominent appearance even in these early days of the Queen's first Parliament. Canada was in revolt, and Lord John Russell brought in a bill suspending the constitution of Lower Canada. Mr. Roebuck was agent and representative of the Province, and claimed the right to be heard at the Bar of the House in opposition to the measure. This was granted, and, according to contemporary record, the House was surprised to find itself instructed by one who "looked like a boy scarcely out of his teens."

I recall another very different scene in the House of Commons, when Mr. Roebuck was the centre of interest. It was in the session of 1878, when party feeling, excited by the foreign policy of Mr. Disraeli, ran high. Mr. Roebuck, though sitting on the Opposition side—a quarter which, politics apart, was more in unison with his constitutional tendencies—supported what at the time was called the Jingo policy. This made his presence below the gangway on the Opposition side especially unwelcome to the Radicals, who claimed the quarter as their own. Mr. Roebuck further aggravated the situation by insisting upon a vested interest in the corner seat, a coign of vantage which in the following Parliament was made more prominent by the occupancy of Lord Randolph Churchill. At this time it was held by Mr. Dillwyn, one of the oldest and most respected members. He daily obtained renewal of possession by the customary course of being down at prayer time. Having observed that not always convenient condition, it was trying to human nature for Mr. Roebuck to arrive at a comfortably late hour and insist on taking the prized place.

There was not only the member for Sheffield to be provided

with room. There was his walking stick, almost as truculent as himself. This he insisted on placing lengthwise at the back of the seat. When Mr. Dillwyn and members seated to his left had moved down to make room for the old man, he had an agreeable fashion of prodding his stick along successive ranges of human backs, till room was made for it to repose at full length. Out of deference to his age and ancient reputation this trial was long suffered. But the worm will turn at last. One evening, in a house crowded in every part in anticipation of a critical debate, the bent figure of Tear'em was seen slowly advancing up the floor, making for the corner seat. It was filled as usual. Roebuck stood leaning on his stick waiting for Mr. Dillwyn to move. The member for Swansea made no sign, staring at the ceiling, apparently unconscious of the figure standing before him, or of the glowering countenance turned upon him. One or two Conservatives on the front bench immediately opposite jumped up, proffering their seats. Roebuck, turning round, slowly crossed the floor, and, amid a ringing cheer from the Conservatives, finally entered their fold.

The Queen's first Parliament did not meet in the stately palace that to-day dominates the Thames at Westminster. Nor was it gathered in the old building through which rang the voices of Pitt and Fox. That was destroyed by fire three years before the Queen came to the throne. The new Houses of Parliament were commenced in 1840, and it was not till 1852 that the Commons met for the first time in their new House. Meanwhile, the business of the Legislature was carried on in a temporary building. The Queen's first appearance on the Parliamentary scene was on the 17th of July, 1837, when she prorogued the Parliament in session at the time of the death of William the Fourth. We find in contemporary records that the speech was read "in a low, sweet, clear voice heard all over the House." Her Majesty was dressed in a white satin robe decorated with jewels and gold, the Garter on her arm, a mantle of crimson velvet over her shoulders.

When the new Parliament was elected (at that date a proceeding peremptorily following on the demise of the Crown) the Queen opened it in person, the sweet voice from the throne pleading that "the early age at which I am called to the sovereignty of this kingdom renders it a more imperative duty that under Divine Providence I should place my reliance upon your cordial co-oper-

ation and upon the love and affection of all my people." It is a notable fact that in the Queen's first speech on opening Parliament the only legislation promised related to Ireland.

Up to the commencement of the Queen's reign it was the practice, observed as we see in the Queen's earliest experience, for the Sovereign not only to open Parliament in person but frequently to go down to prorogue it. Whilst the Prince Consort was yet alive the Queen commonly lent to the opening session the grace and dignity of her presence. Upon her great bereavement the habit of abstention from public ceremonial extended to Parliamentary proceedings. Mr. Disraeli having won his way to the Premiership, the Queen honored him by personally opening the Parliament he led. Thrice during his premiership Her Majesty appeared at Westminster. Once was the memorable occasion when Benjamin Disraeli became Earl of Beaconsfield. One has vivid recollection of the scene on the February day, in 1877, when the Queen entered the crowded and expectant House of Lords, preceded by the heralds clad in gorgeous cloth of gold. In the procession there appeared a familiar face, a strangely disguised figure. It was hard to think that the personage in the red cloak tipped with ermine, who bore aloft a jewelled scabbard, was the somewhat dingily dressed Dizzy we had known so long in the Commons. Yet it was he, now Earl of Beaconsfield, carrying the Sword of State, in attendance on the Queen whom he had just made Empress of India.

In these later times the Queen's voice is not heard. The speech is in charge of the Lord Chancellor, who, when the Queen is seated on the throne, and the Commons, summoned by Black Rod, have ranged themselves at the Bar, advances, and on bended knee proffers the document. By a gesture of the hand the Queen signs him to read it. Thus it comes to pass that the Queen opens Parliament without opening her mouth.

The whole business, as far as the Queen is concerned, does not occupy more than fifteen minutes. But the scene is worthy of the setting and the occasion. For once the Peers wear their robes, flooding the floor of the House with a mass of color. This is diversified by the uniforms and orders of the Foreign Ambassadors, for whom provision is made on the benches to the right of the woolsack, where in ordinary times the Bishops flock. Here are seen the Turkish Minister with



his fez ; the Japanese and Persian ministers in their gay uniforms ; the members of the Chinese Legation in round high caps and petticoats, looking as if they had just stepped off the panel of a tea chest. Here are the ministers of Continental powers, their breasts ablaze with orders. Here, before Greece found she could not afford the luxury of a Plenipotentiary at the Court of St. James's, gleamed the Greek Minister, in tight white breeches and petticoat of cloth of gold ; and here, conspicuous by his plain morning dress, is found the American minister.

To the picturesqueness of the scene the judges lend their sage countenances, their full-bottomed wigs, their ermine gowns. They have places provided for them immediately before the woolsack, where they sit among the surpliced bishops. On this rare occasion women have their rights, a considerable proportion of the benches on the floor of the House being allotted to the Peeresses, whilst other ladies garland the long length of the side galleries. The coming of the Prince and Princess of Wales usually precedes the arrival of the Queen. The Prince wears the robes of a Peer, with no difference save that the quaint garment is tied at the throat with white silk ribbon. The Princess is conducted to the woolsack, where she sits with her back to the thronged House, her face to the throne. Meanwhile the Prince of Wales takes his seat in a chair set for him at the right of the throne. As the Prince and Princess of Wales enter, a swift, soft, rustling sound fills the chamber. It is the ladies, who have hitherto sat with opera cloaks covering their shoulders, beginning now with one accord to throw them off, revealing the flashing light of countless costly jewels.

When after long interval the Queen was, in 1876, again present at the opening of Parliament the white satin frock of girlhood's days had given place to a robe of imperial purple, so dark in hue that at a short distance it might have passed for black. On her head, surmounting the white pointed cap familiar in many of her portraits, was set a miniature crown of diamonds. Round her throat was strung a magnificent necklace of diamonds. On her breast the Koh-i-noor flashed like a comet. The jewel of the Order of the Garter glistened on the broad band of blue ribbon that crossed her shoulder. These were unwonted splendors of array, assumed in honor of the state occasion. Contrast-

ing with them, possibly more to the Queen's taste, were the simple black fan she carried and the black gloves that covered hands and wrists.

Though the Queen has long relapsed into abstention from taking personal part in the opening of the recurring session of Parliament, she watches its course with closest interest. Ordinary people obtain information of what passes in the House of Commons from their morning newspapers. The Queen has a special reporter, who with his own hand draws "Pictures in Parliament" for her Majesty's special information. He is no less a person than the Leader of the House. It was George the Third who instituted this parliamentary practice. In his time there were no long reports of parliamentary proceedings in the newspapers, and his Majesty commanded Lord North to despatch to him nightly a letter descriptive of the proceedings, cataloguing the results of the sitting. Most newspapers to-day have under various titles their parliamentary summary. Lord North was the first parliamentary summary writer. The continuous story has been abundantly supplemented during the Queen's reign, the bookshelves in the private library at Windsor bulging with the record of three score years. The work is written by a rare series of eminent hands—Sir Robert Peel, Lord John Russell, Lord Palmerston, Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Gladstone, Lord Randolph Churchill, to-day Mr. Balfour, yesterday Sir William Harcourt. It would be delightful and instructive reading, and is much too good to be wasted on the desert air of Windsor Palace library.

The only peep the public have been permitted to gain of this rare treasure-trove is possible in Sir Theodore Martin's *Life of the Prince Consort*. There will be found a few passages from Disraeli's letters, written from the Treasury Bench in the House of Commons during Lord Derby's second administration. Dizzy was then in the prime of life, and was sedulously setting himself to overcome the strong personal dislike with which the Queen, influenced by the Prince Consort, at the time regarded him. Here was an opportunity of showing her Majesty what potentiality of an interesting companion, a sprightly correspondent, lurked under the glossy curls of the new Chancellor of the Exchequer. Dizzy was at pains to make the most of the opportunity. His nightly account of parliamentary proceedings doubtless lacks the grim accuracy of Sir Robert Peel's communi-

cations ; but, judging from the specimens available, they sparkle with point, are as full of graphic touches as is *Coningsby*.

It is a peculiarity connected with this important ministerial function that the letter to the Queen shall, with the assistance of a blotting pad spread on the knee, be written from the Treasury Bench in full view of the House. It would appear more convenient that the Leader of the House should repair to his own room, and with the convenience of a writing desk, compose his letter. More than sixty years ago Sir Robert Peel, coming in with his first Ministry, and being as much hurried as was possible with one of his temperaments, began to write the letter on his knee, seated on the Treasury Bench. His successor imitated him. Sir Robert, coming back again in 1841, returned to his early habit. Thus it became established.

Mr. Gladstone introduced a characteristic variety into the practice. In the stormy sittings of the Parliament of 1880-5 he adroitly availed himself of the opportunity of successive divisions to get his letter to the Queen written. Commencing it on the Treasury Bench while the question was being put and the House cleared for a division, he, as soon as the tellers were named, with youthful alacrity headed the procession for the door. Planting himself at one of the writing tables in the division lobby he went on with his work while his followers trooped past. The division over, he returned, bringing up the rear, happy in the consciousness that he had utilized ten precious minutes that would otherwise have been lost on a busy day.

Those present on that night in June, 1885, when the government were unexpectedly defeated on Sir Michael Hicks-Beach's Budget amendment can never forget how Mr. Gladstone wrote his letter to the Queen. It was half-past one in the morning when he resumed his seat after winding up the debate in an animated speech. When the House was cleared for the division he hastened out carrying blotting pad and sheet of paper, coming back with his letter half written. While members streamed in from either side, and the buzz of excitement grew to stormy heights, Mr. Gladstone went on writing, presenting his humble duty to the Queen, and informing her Majesty how matters thus far fared. Before he had finished, Lord Randolph Churchill had leaped upon the bench below the gangway, hat in hand, wildly cheering, and the Premier, still going on writing, was enabled to add to his

budget of news the interesting item that in a House of 516 members her Majesty's government had been defeated by a majority of twelve.

The Prince of Wales, in this as in other matters filling parts in public life too laborious for the Queen's advancing years, is a frequent attendant upon Parliamentary proceedings. As a peer he carries the title of Duke of Cornwall, but, in common with the other royal princes, he sits in the House as a prince of royal blood. His place is on the front cross bench facing the wool-sack, a situation indicative of the evenly balanced mind—"the cross bench mind" Lord Granville happily called it—which is not in thrall to any political party. The Duke of Cambridge has from time to time taken part in debate. The Prince of Wales' active participation in the proceedings of the House is confined to the occasional presentation of a petition in favor of the bill legalizing marriage with a deceased wife's sister. As a rule, invariable upon political issues, the Prince abstains from the division lobby, but for many years he has voted in favor of the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill.

At one time, much more than of late years, His Royal Highness was a constant visitor to the House of Commons, his pleasant presence beaming from the center seat of the Peer's gallery immediately over the clock. During the turbulent times that marked the birth of the Parnellite party he frequently dropped in to watch the recurring crises. This habit gave the late Mr. Joseph Gillis Biggar an opportunity of distinguishing himself above his fellows. One Tuesday evening in the early spring of 1875 Mr. Chaplin, then a private member, secured first place for a motion relating to the breed of horses. The Prince of Wales, accompanied by a numerous suite of peers whose faces were familiar at Newmarket and Epsom, came down to hear the speech and the debate. It was a great opportunity for Mr. Chaplin, and he was evidently prepared to rise to it. Unfortunately for him he had chanced some days earlier to offend Mr. Biggar. Joey B.—the member for Cavan—like the redoubtable Joe Bagstock, was sly, dev'lish sly. If Mr. Chaplin saw his opportunity, Joseph not only descried his, but seized it first.

Mr. Chaplin had risen, fixed his eyeglass, smitten himself reassuringly on his portly chest, had coughed in prelude to his opening sentence, when from below the gangway opposite, a well

known shrill voice was heard exclaiming: "Mr. Speaker, sir, I believe there are strangers in the House."

For a moment the crowded chamber was hushed in dismayed silence. The Speaker broke it by enquiring whether the honorable member for Cavan persisted in his intention of noticing strangers. "If you please, Mr. Speaker," said Mr. Biggar with encouraging nod towards the chair. Then the anger of the House found issue in a roar of contumely, through which was heard the unparliamentary, almost unprecedented, sound of hissing. Honorable members might just as usefully have sat down by the river's brink and shouted "Stop" to the falls of Niagara. At that time there was in force the mediæval order which required the immediate and absolute withdrawal of strangers from every part of the House upon an individual member taking note of their presence. Mr. Biggar was master of the situation, and few human faces offered an opening for exceeding the breadth of his smile as he surveyed it.

The speaker had no option. He must needs order strangers to withdraw. Thereupon the Prince of Wales, the German Ambassador, who happened to be in the diplomatic gallery, and the crowd of peers, boasting the bluest blood in England, were compelled to scuttle. Mr. Biggar had his fun, but the House of Commons reaped permanent benefit from the prank. He brought into broad daylight the absurdity of the ancient custom, which was thenceforward doomed. The privilege of spying strangers is no longer counted among the possessions of individual members of the House of Commons. Strangers may to-day be excluded, but only upon motion duly made and carried by a majority.

H. W. LUCY.

*(To be continued.)*